

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 IO-14 ISO-00 PCH-02 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 OMB-01 NIC-01

DRC-01 /150 W

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R 151315Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4188

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

/AMEMBASSY ROME 637

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 246

DEPT PASS CAIRO AND POUCH SANAA

BEIRUT PASS DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, LY

SUBJECT: ONE OFFICIAL'S EXPLANATION OF HOW LIBYAN-
TUNISIAN MERGER AGREEMENT CAME ABOUT

REF: TUNIS 224

1. MOHAMED SAYAH, DEPUTY OF PRIME MINISTER AND DIRECTOR
OF PSD, GAVE FOREIGN JOURNALIST JAN 14 FOLLOWING EXPLANATION
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OF HOW TUNISIA-LIBYA MERGER AGREEMENT DEVELOPED. HE SAID

WHEN BOURGUIBA VISITED TRIPOLI ON SEPT 1, BOURGUIBA TOLD QADHAFI THAT HIS CHANCES FOR UNITY WITH EGYPT WERE NIL ("E'EST DE L'AIR"). ACCORDING TO SAYAH, BOURGUIBA TOLD QADHAFI NEVERTHELESS TO TRY AND WORK OUT UNION WITH EGYPT BY DEC 31. IF BY THAT DATE HE CONVINCED UNION NOT POSSIBLE WITH EGYPT, HE COULD COME TO TUNISIA AND THEY WOULD FORM UNION.

2. BOURGUIBA THEN WENT TO NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE WHERE HE EXPLAINED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE WHAT HE HAD TOLD QADHAFI AND HE PROPOSED TO BOUMEDIENE THAT ALGERIA, TUNISIA AND LIBYA ALL JOIN TOGETHER. BOUMEDIENE WAS NONCOMMITTAL. (SAYAH RECALLED BOUMEDIENE HAD OFFERED UNION TO TUNISIA AT SAKIET SIDI YOUSSEF MEETING IN FEB 1973. WHILE WE HEARD FROM GOT OFFICIAL -- FORMER SEC GEN FON MIN MESTIRI -- THAT BOUMEDIENE HAD PROPOSED UNION TO BOURGUIBA IN FEB, WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANY ALGERIAN CONFIRMATION OF THIS.) BOURGUIBA DID ANNOUNCE AT NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE HIS PLAN FOR NORTH AFRICAN CONFEDERATION WHICH WOULD ALSO INCLUDE MAURETANIA.

3. SAYAH SAID QADHAFI CAME TO TUNISIA AT HIS OWN INITIATIVE ON JAN 12. HE BROUGHT WITH HIM THE PREPARED STATEMENT WHICH THE TWO LEADERS SIGNED. IT WAS QADHAFI WHO PROPOSED THAT REFERENDUM BE HELD ON JAN 18. SAYAH'S EXPLANATION FOR WHY BOURGUIBA SIGNED THE DOCUMENT IS THAT AFTER HAVING PROPOSED UNION TO QADHAFI, HE COULD HARDLY TURN HIM DOWN WHEN HE CAME TO HIM. SAYAH SAID, HOWEVER, BOURGUIBA WILL MOVE TOWARD UNION AT HIS OWN PACE AND INDICATED THAT FIRST SLOWDOWN WILL BE IN ORGANIZING REFERENDUM. HE SAID QADHAFI HAD VERY UNREALISTIC IDEA ABOUT HOW FAST THIS COULD BE ORGANIZED IN TUNISIA. HE EVEN SUGGESTED THAT IT NOT NECESSARY COUNT REFERENDUM BALLOTS OR HAVE SECRET BALLOT. THERE COULD BE A "YES" BOX AND A "NO" BOX AT EACH POLLING PLACE, AND BOXES WOULD BE WEIGHED AFTER VOTE COMPLETED. SAYAH ADDED, "YOU SEE NOW THE KINDS OF PROBLEMS WE HAVE".

4. COMMENT: SO FAR THIS IS MOST PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THIS SHOTGUN MARRIAGE THAT WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE.
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IT DOES NOT, HOWEVER, MAKE POSSIBILITY OF UNION ANY MORE LIKELY, AND, IN FACT, WITH REMOVAL OF MASOUDI AND NECESSARY POSTPONEMENT OF REFERENDUM, CHANCES OF EARLY COLLAPSE OF UNION ARE INCREASED.

SEELYE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CAIRO.
POUCHED SANAA.

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